

Dear Honorable Members of the Connecticut State Legislature:

I'm an English teacher with 23 years experience in public education; also, I'm a mother of three children whom have been educated in the public school system. From my perspective both C.C.S.S. and S.E.E.D. have had a negative impact on education because I believe the root of both is not driven by what is best for the child or the profession; instead, money has been the driving factor. And with this administration, more so than the ones before it, data-collection is the way to "Race to the Top" to determine who gets the most funding.

I've witnessed many changes over the span of my career, but never have I witnessed any so frightening as the ones before us now. We seem to be returning to a "teach to the test" mentality. It is absolutely absurd to me to devote an entire class lesson to instructing every member of the junior student body on content (on a designated day), so "they are all on the same page" before taking the S.B.A.C. field test. If that's not teaching to the test, I don't know what is. Data driven instruction, by it's very nature, is about testing for the right or wrong answers; it has to be in order to be countable. I was so happy when we moved away from that philosophy years ago. In fact, there was a time when S.A.T. prep courses were taken out of the high school because public education didn't want to associate with a teaching to the test/rote learning mentality. Now, we are administering P.S.A.T. not once, but twice to students, during their sophomore and junior years. Why? Because it's countable. It's one more piece of evidence the districts can show the driving forces behind this reform (who aren't even educators themselves) in order to win the race.

My question is: where is critical thinking in all of this? Isn't that what students need to be prepared for 21st century careers, some of which don't even exist yet. Our society is constantly changing. Our students need to be creative, collaborative, knowledgeable, resourceful, critical thinkers and entrepreneurs, when inherent to the C.C.S.S. standards and data-driven instruction is anti-critical, creative thought. In this fast paced world, we need to develop the whole child. Common Core State Standards is not the answer.

While, as an educator, I could conceive it would be a good idea to have a common core as a nation, the committee who put this C.C.S.S. together got it all wrong because they weren't skilled professionals who know the field. As far as I'm concerned, the committee should be comprised only of an array of skilled, experienced professionals who represent multiple facets of education (with regards to content, demographic, positions held, level of experience) to develop national standards.

From the perspective of parent, my first born, who graduated in 2009, took the C.A.P.T. test during his sophomore year-- the only mastery test he was required to take. Consequently, my youngest, a junior this year, has taken a practice C.A.P.T. during her freshman year, C.A.P.T. during her sophomore year, P.S.A.T. during her sophomore and junior years, quarterly common assessments in each of her content courses each year, and is now slated to take the S.B.A.C. field test this year. The hours alone that she has been required to commit to testing is, at best, excessive. These hours equate to lost instructional time she could/should have received when, instead, she was a pawn in data collection race. It has always been lost on me, other than the money argument, why S.A.T., a national standardized test, isn't recognized as measurement versus a state mastery test. Isn't S.B.A.C. trying to replicate the very purpose S.A.T. was imposed in the first place?

In addition to the loss of instructional time, the lack of planning, preparation and development time has taken a hit due to these recent reforms. In my district, Tuesdays have become extended work days for the purpose of meeting time, under the guise of professional

development and collaboration, when, in fact, it's done anything but develop me professionally; instead, this time has been consumed by training on C.C.S.S. and instruction for S.E.E.D. Prior to this reform, two Tuesdays per month were devoted to department and faculty meetings; now, every Tuesday is. It has significantly impeded my ability to work with students individually, plan lessons, adjust lessons based on formative assessments, etc.. I spend more of my personal time, now, working than I ever have in my career. To date, 226 hours, this instructional year thus far, over and above my contractual time has been spent on school work, including 12 hours devoted solely to S.E.E.D. paperwork; I am not alone. As a result, the school climate is at an all time low because teachers, like myself, are so stretched and stressed due changes we see as oppressive and meaningless. Yet we, as devoted educators, know what's right for our students; thus, we're having to negotiate between what we're being told to do and what we know the students need. This model of teacher evaluation is tedious, and doesn't, in any way, enhance or enrich my teaching; in fact, it's crippling.

When just last week, I announced information regarding upcoming S.B.A.C. and the preparatory lesson to my junior classes, every one of them shrunk in their seats and many groaned. Is this what we want for our students? Even they know testing not directly connected to meaningful instruction is a waste of time. Instead, we need to find ways to inspire students' quest for learning versus causing them to shut down. Time should be spent on methods to develop the whole student, to get students excited about education, to find it meaningful and applicable to their lives, to prepare them for the complex learning they will need in order to thrive when they graduate. We need to encourage students to think outside the box, not color in a bubble.

On behalf of myself, my colleagues, my children and my students, I implore you to put a stop to this madness. Reevaluate the premises and the implications of C.C.S.S., S.B.A.C. and S.E.E.D. It's not too late to really get down to the business of preparing our students for 21st century learning and supporting our teachers to develop the pedagogy necessary for its success.

Sincerely,
Donna Norman Carbone
Cheshire, CT